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# The Watermen of White Oak & The Patawomeck Tribe

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**The Watermen of White Oak**

**&**

**The Patawomeck Tribe**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from  
The College of William and Mary

by

William Clark Foster

Accepted for \_\_\_\_\_  
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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Williamsburg, VA  
**April 28, 2009**

## **Contents**

Preface	1
Chapter 1: <i>An Introduction to the Field Setting, and an Exploration of Early Concerns</i>	6
Chapter 2: <i>Remembrance</i>	13
Chapter 3: <i>The Watermen and the Tribe</i>	21
Chapter 4: <i>Reflexivity and Conclusions</i>	34
Appendices and Addenda	51
References Cited	58

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I would also like to thank Dr. Moretti-Langholtz, for helping to assure that this project remained a valuable learning experience throughout.

## ***Preface***

The following essay is purely ethnographic. To combine the ethnographic data I collected along the shores of Potomac Creek, where weathered watermen eke out a living collecting what's left of the tributary's fish and crab, with documentary evidence regarding the fishing techniques of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Virginia Indians is not the objective of my research. While the Patawomeck Tribe, reformed in March 1995 under the leadership of Robert "Two Eagles" Green, may find some of the information I have collected and presented here useful toward furthering their pursuit of state recognition as an Indian tribe, this research was never intended to assist directly in the pursuit of a political goal.

Most members of the modern Patawomeck Tribe live within or near White Oak, Virginia, a rural community northwest of Fredericksburg. Throughout the following essay, I refer to regularly to "White Oak" and "White Oakers," categories that denote the descendent community collective and individual members, respectively. The Patawomeck Tribe boasts over 500 enrolled members today, though not every individual who is eligible for Tribal membership has chosen to enroll. The aforementioned categories do not discriminate between enrolled and non-enrolled community members, but refer instead to a more inclusive category of all people recognized by the community itself as "native" to the area. The focus of my research, the so-called "watermen," is a subgroup of the White Oak community that includes those individuals who currently depend upon the Potomac River and its tributaries for their livelihood, as well as those who once did the same, but have, for one reason or another, given up the trade. I draw an important

distinction between those individuals who worked as watermen at some point in their lives but do not do so today, and those who still engage in the practice, and the reader would be wise to pay close attention to this division.

The Patawomeck have shown a deep interest in the local watermen throughout its reformation process. They recognize the watermen's lifestyle as a prominent aspect of the community's remembered past, and draws connections, too, between the historic Patawomeck and their living community. Though many of the Tribe's members worked as watermen at some point in their lives, they have had difficulty engaging currently active watermen and convincing them to enroll. Though it was never explicitly stated by any Tribal representative, I feel confident stating here that my invitation to White Oak arose from the Patawomeck's desire to bring the watermen "into the fold," to send the message that they are both respected and sought after, that they are essential to the Tribe's complete reformation.

The Patawomeck Tribe, moreover, formally led by Chief Robert "Two Eagles" Green, is currently seeking official recognition as an Indian tribe from the Commonwealth of Virginia. The College of William & Mary, and more specifically The American Indian Resource Center, has been working with the Tribe since 1999, throughout the majority of its reorganization process and its pursuit of official recognition. Some readers may feel that an arrangement of this kind, where the community of study has a vested political interest in the research material produced by the students and faculty involved, in some way precludes good ethnography. Indeed, all of my informants, those enrolled in the tribe and those who aren't, were well aware of the fact that I was in White Oak under the Patawomeck Tribe's auspices, and many likely supposed that any information I gathered would eventually end up in hands of the Tribe.

Where individuals or a collective stands to gain politically from the data that an ethnographer reports, all data, some would say, is fundamentally tainted.

To draw such a conclusion, however, would reveal a stubborn attachment to an antiquated, and quite frankly impossible, definition of good ethnography. Not only is it impossible for modern anthropologists to adhere to Malinowski's strict instructions, an all-inclusive approach in which "the field Ethnographer has seriously and soberly to cover the full extent of the phenomena in each aspect of tribal culture studied...the whole area of tribal culture *in all its aspects*" (Malinowski:1922), but even to utilize the discipline's traditional rubric, outlined by Jim Boon as "physical surroundings firmly first, religion vaguely last, kinship and social organization determiningly at the core" (Boon 1982:14), would now be a misguided and doomed approach in many field settings. As Clifford Geertz wrote of the changing landscape in which anthropology must now operate, "There has been a transformation of the people anthropologists mostly write about, from colonial subject to sovereign citizens," which has "altered entirely the moral context in which the ethnographic act takes place" and which "leaves the contemporary anthropologists in some uncertainty as to rhetorical aim" (Geertz 1988:132-33). Today, the anthropologist cannot expect to work with an "untouched" or "pristine" society, and for many anthropologists, meaningful questions have become an elusive quarry. As Geertz goes on to say, "If there is any way to counter the conception of ethnography as an iniquitous act or an unplayable game, it would seem to involve owning up to the fact that, like quantum mechanics or the Italian opera, it is a work of the imagination" (Geertz 1988:149). In my own research, complex political relationships within the community, between subsets of the community and myself, and between my own conception of an ethnographer-self and activist-self, together created a dizzying web of expectations and

relationships that challenged the very notion of anthropology, as I'd learned to understand it, as something fundamentally attainable. The following essay, therefore, does not fit a typical model, as typical models fail us with increasing regularity. Perhaps it is a work of the imagination. Somewhere between science and art, the following essay is an attempt to present my surprising entree into ethnographic fieldwork in the modern world.

To lay some empirical groundwork, the watermen and Patawomeck Tribe are not arguing over how the watermen fish, what they catch, or how they've changed over the years, and while these might be the objects of a traditional ethnographic inquiry, they are not the central objects of my research here. Much of this raw empirical information, that which concerns the bare-boned practices of local watermen, is available elsewhere. Some of it has been printed in articles in the Fredericksburg Freelance Star and the Stafford County Chronicle, in a series of stories featuring interviews with the local watermen. Some could be found in the work of Frank Speck, the anthropologist who briefly visited White Oak and in 1928 published an ethnographic description of the "Powhatan Tribes" of Virginia. Some still had been shared with Doug Owens in 2001, and presented in his thesis. As the Patawomeck continue their struggle for state recognition, I will attempt the task of organizing that body of data, adding to it with that data I collected that can be found nowhere else. The virtue of an undergraduate thesis, though, lies in its lack of circumscription; I've taken this opportunity to explore matters that interest me, unfettered by expectation, and range freely from anthropological inquiry to somewhat indulgent reflexivity. Thus, a more empirically focused, data-heavy research endeavor will capture my attention soon enough, but for now, as I finish the first phase of my induction into the discipline of anthropology, I'm going to have it my way.

As a final introductory item, I would like to forewarn the reader, and admit now that what I have written here may feel disjointed, lacking in smooth transition from one chapter to the next. I consider this to be a representation of the multiple currents of thought and experience that defined my field experience. On one hand, I was an ethnographer, trying to make sense of what I saw in the field. On the other, I am a student of ethnography trying to figure out *how* to make sense of the same. I sought simultaneously to come to some conclusion, to make a discovery or two at least, and to understand for myself how conditions of the field experience clashed or rhymed with my hopes and expectations. Perhaps both halves are incomplete, but in my eyes, total attention to one to the detriment of the other would have been a greater failure.

All of this being said, the ethnographic piece that follows concerns the relationship dynamics between active watermen, former watermen, old men, and the modern Patawomeck Tribe. But there is another dimension to the piece as well, intended to be instructive to young students of anthropology, such as myself, who have been trained with classic texts, produced in a world that scarcely resembles the one we inhabit today. It is with some of these points of concern that I will begin.



## ***Chapter One***

### ***An Introduction to the Field Setting, and an Exploration of Early Concerns***

#### **A point of departure:**

As a William & Mary student, I was considered in White Oak to be an ally of the Patawomeck. It is well known across the community that, over the last ten years, the Patawomeck have worked closely with the American Indian Resource Center at the College. Eleven students visited White Oak before my arrival in the summer of 2008, and declarations of gratitude are often voiced by Tribal members and printed in the Tribal newsletter. In the most recent issue, for example, Chief Green writes:

*[I] had the opportunity to preview the work of the William and Mary students that worked with many of you on the book they will be publishing on the Patawomeck people ... We can be assured that it is something we will all want to share with our families.*

This is the atmosphere in which I worked, and I believe it best to declare this fact both early and openly.

This atmosphere of expectation serves as one example of the complications and concerns that arose during the course of my fieldwork. There were other matters than I had to contend with, some of which had determining effects on what anthropological issues I was able to pursue. I will begin with these concerns, and only then proceed to what could be considered the more traditionally ethnographic portion of the essay. Ethnographers often save this feature of their texts for their closing remarks, or even present it in an entirely separate work, but I think it preferable to expose the reader to this material first, allowing him or her to proceed through the ethnography armed with as much context as possible.

**Some commentary on my informants<sup>1</sup>, and how interviews were arranged:**

*“The kinds of information an anthropologist is able to gather in the field depend on his access to channels of information. These in turn depend on the command he has over persons who are in strategic positions within the social organization of the group studied and who are thus in the nexus of the communication network.”*

*“...The analysis of the progression of his [the anthropologist’s] field research may in itself become a part of his collected data. In this way method and results become more closely aligned as integrated parts of ethnography.”*

-Hans C. Buechler

From *The Social Position of an Ethnographer in the Field*

A prominent factor in the scope of my research is the “data channel,” and the above quotations are more than suitable in encapsulating their significance in ethnographic research in general. The identity or role of an informant within his community, how he is viewed by his fellows and by proxy the sort of data he can help to uncover, has a profound effect on what an anthropologist will hear or witness while in the field. Moreover, it is the anthropologist’s duty to recognize these channels of information and diversify them to the best of his ability. It is with this particular bit of method that I struggled. While in the field, I saw with clarity a divided community; there seemed to be disagreement or dispute between the oldest men and the active watermen on one side, and the Tribe and its constituent members on the other, with regard to the community’s Indian identity and the purpose or legitimacy of the Tribe itself. I found myself constrained in my ability to cross from one camp into the other, however, and struggled to exert necessary control over my primary informant. As Paul Rabinow reflected on one of his Moroccan informants:

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for list of primary informants and brief bios for each.

*“Despite all the conflict, he knew that the more he did for me the more I was dependent on him, the more I would reciprocate, the more I became ‘his’ anthropologist ... How to limit and control the tendency of informants toward possessiveness was a central problem throughout my fieldwork” (75).*

This was my experience with Gary. In his eyes, the fact he served as liaison to the William & Mary anthropologist was a point of pride. I could sense his disappointment when I neglected to report my daily activities to him, or scheduled my day without consulting him. These emotional responses are completely understandable considering Gary’s dedication to Tribal reformation efforts, and it goes without saying that I am deeply grateful for his help and kindness. Without him, I would not have been able to work in the community at all. An unfamiliar and unaffiliated visitor with unknown motives suddenly appearing in White Oak and asking probing questions would not, needless to say, get very far. In short, Gary got me in the door.

Nonetheless, to study the watermen, who seemed at best unsure of how they fit into the process of tribal reorganization, while being directly associated with one of the tribe’s major proponents, proved predictably problematic. Unfortunately, there was no way for me to anticipate this problem, as the Tribe’s rocky relationship with the active watermen and Gary’s leading role in tribal matters were unknown to me prior to my arrival in the field. Looking back on the earliest phases of my research, I see the warnings signs. At the time, though, I simply didn’t know what I was looking at, and this problematic potentiality of limited data channels slipped by me unnoticed.

In the of 2002, Doug Owens, a senior anthropology student at the College, performed fieldwork that, at least in name, focused on the watermen; he called his thesis “Losing Their Voice: An In-Depth Analysis of Present-Day Problems Faced by the Patawomeck Waterman of White Oak, Virginia.” The category he creates here, that of

the “Patawomeck watermen,” is (unintentionally) representative of a complex local debate over history, identity, and power. Before entering the field, the idea of a “Patawomeck watermen” was not a problematic one. This terminology was so ubiquitous, both in speaking with the Tribe and reading previous student research, that I uncritically adopted it as well. Soon, however, I found contention in the community: “watermen” and a “Patawomeck watermen” were terms not used interchangeably or equally by all White Oakers. Before long, I found myself obsessing over the question. Who is a “Patawomeck watermen,” and who isn’t? Why do some individuals who identify as watermen enroll in the Tribe, while others don’t? My involvement with Gary, as I will illustrate below, hamstrung my investigation into these questions.

While the identities of his informants are hidden somewhat through his use of pseudonyms, it’s quite clear now that Gary played the same host role for Owens as he did for me. Gary attempted to arrange meetings and interviews between Owens and the watermen, but what appeared to me then to be a series of unfortunate consequences, missed appointments and unlocatable people, now reveals itself to be something entirely different: the watermen were deliberately avoiding Owens.

Discussing his preliminary to White Oak in 2000, Owens writes: “When we arrived, we were greeted by the size of a dozen men standing around and chatting outside...Out of the men present, only two men named Jonathan (Leroy) and Arnold (Earl) were immediately ready to sit down in front of my camera and be interviewed” (Owens 2002:4). This was in 2000, and Owens was only the second William & Mary student to work in the community. I believe that at this point in time, the watermen were not as aware of the tribe’s intentions as they are today. Notably though, while a dozen men evidently showed up at Gary’s machine shop for the interview, only two were ready

and willing to speak.

Two years later, Owens once again visits White Oak, he reports an intriguing series of events of which I could make little sense of a year ago. First, he describes accompanying Gary as he flags down two watermen returning from a morning on the Creek: “Jesse and I chatted a little; Jesse took a little prodding from Melvin [Gary<sup>2</sup>] to speak with me while Cliff stayed silent the whole time” (Owens 2002:10). Owens doesn’t go into further detail on what exactly this “prodding” consisted of, but the hesitancy of the two watermen comes through unambiguously. Later that same day, Gary takes Owens to the home of another of the watermen. Here, a similar thing transpires: “When we arrived at James’ docks, James was nowhere to be found. Melvin had called and talked to James earlier, but James had just left” (14). Then, two weeks later, Owens returned to White Oak, and this time Gary had arranged a meeting with all of the watermen:

*Melvin had assured me that he had called every waterman he knew to tell them about the interview. When I pulled up to Melvin’s metal shop, there were no other cars around besides Melvin’s. Melvin seemed concerned because no one had shown yet. I wasn’t worried. I was sure that this interview would be the same as two years ago: at least a dozen watermen would show up. (Owens 2002:16)*

It’s rather embarrassing for me to read these passages today, and admit that I didn’t give such events more thought. To exonerate myself somewhat, over the course of the next several hours, as Owens goes on to say, a total of seven watermen made an appearance at Gary’s. This, in part, is why my suspicions weren’t aroused. However, reading over the raw field notes attached to the thesis, it’s clear now that Gary dominated the discussion. The “other seven watermen,” their identities indeterminable, seem to have been very

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<sup>2</sup> Here, I’ve provided my own pseudonym in brackets directly following Owens’ pseudonym.

quiet during the interview, five of them evidently saying nothing at all. If little else, this should serve as further evidence that the community division I discuss here is no illusion, or merely a product of the conditions of my own particular fieldwork.

Though these facts were still only beginning to take shape in my mind during my first week in White Oak, I determined soon enough that if I hoped to get a complete picture, it were best that I find some way to distance myself from Gary. While I attempted to work out a strategy, though, I became more aware of how impossible such a maneuver would be. News travels quickly in White Oak. If I were to pursue informants independently, or revisit those that Gary had introduced me to previously without his accompaniment, there is no doubt that my autonomous activities would quickly reach Gary's ears. He wouldn't be mad, I imagine, but would certainly recognize my conclusion that his constant companionship was a matter of concern.

No amount of class work can adequately prepare the young ethnographer to deal with such a dilemma. It must be learned in the field, and often on the fly. In the end, I could not overcome it or find a way out independently. Hiding my association with Gary seemed both unethical and unfeasible. I did manage to carry out interviews without Gary sitting beside me or hovering behind, and this is some consolation. All the while though, my close association with Gary was well-known by all of my informants; the best I could do was accept this as a fact of my field experience, and truthfully declare to each of my informants that I was not visiting on behalf of the tribe, but rather to gather information for the sake of posterity and out of a general duty to the pursuit of historical truth. Whether or not this comforted by informants or encouraged greater candidness, I can't be sure. In any case, though, they revealed what they chose to knowing that the Tribe, in one way or another, arranged for my stay in White Oak. Regrettably, I may never know

how many active watermen chose not to speak with me as a result of my relationship with the Tribe, or what they might have been able to tell had the opportunity become available.

In most cases, the active watermen's feelings toward the Tribe remained hidden or beyond access. One active watermen, though, was willing to open up. Earl, still working the water daily though he is in his mid sixties, discussed the Tribe and his opinion of it readily, and I will discuss the content of these conversations below.

I should add now, though, that the partiality of perspectives I could collect through my research does not preclude rich ethnography. The evidence I gathered is indeed multi-perspectival. Some individuals I spoke with supported tribal reformation, and were themselves enrolled. Some opposed it outright. Still others had no strong aversion to the idea of Tribal reorganization, but elected for personal reasons not to enroll. These are each significant categories in the local debate between those who support Tribal efforts and those who do not, and I will examine each in turn.

As a final note, and to deter the specter of sneaking suspicion, though certain of my informants are strong advocates of the tribe's current efforts, there was not conscious or deliberate misrepresentation or prevarication on anyone's part in an attempt to give prominence to a historical account that favored their agenda. I never encountered any factual contradictions when comparing one informant's words with another's that would indicate such fabrication. Differences were found in one informant's relationship with the watermen's past, and the place he felt it held in community history, and as will be shown below, I interpret these differences as dynamic products of either an informant's age or his status as a waterman; the differences are subconscious or unconscious, and do not indicate a deliberate or goal-oriented reformulation of the past.

## ***Chapter Two***

### ***Remembrance***

*“To know what we were confirms that we are.”*  
-David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*

George Marcus, in his *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, characterizes ethnographic writing as a frequent finessing of historical context, accomplished “by situating one’s ethnography either before or after ‘the deluge,’” the moment at which foreign (i.e., Western) elements diffused into a community and changed it profoundly. To do so, Marcus asserts, is to introduce an artificial temporal dynamic to an ever-changing community of living actors. As Renato Rosaldo wrote in the opening chapter of *Culture and Truth*, “We should not impose our categories on other people’s lives because they probably do not apply, at least not without serious revision” (Rosaldo 1989:26). Quite right, and I only employ the “before and after” device in the following essay because members of the community here presented dichotomize their history in this very way. There is an “old time” diametrically opposed to “these days,” a rift which correlates to a sequence of events, symptoms of globalization, that transpired during 1940’s. This division is not my own creation, something that I myself apply because I see in the community’s recent history a marked moment of profound cultural change. It is endemic to the community itself.

The eldest men with whom I spoke, Jimbo, Leroy, Rich, and Gordon, possess a historical perspective on the community that is uniquely deep. It was during this generation’s early adulthood, in the 1940’s, that significant changes for the watermen on Potomac Creek occurred. They remember this time of turmoil well, but I believe that this



era of transition is seen as all the more painful because it coincided with this generation's 'coming of age,' when the true responsibilities of adult life became harshly evident. These men entered into adulthood while the fabric of the community, and particularly life on the water, was under great and, within the confines of the remembered past, unprecedented, strain. Though I will not go into great detail, an abridged version of some of the period's greatest changes will help illustrate White Oak's unique past and relatively recent degree of significant isolation.

In the "old times", the story would begin, five<sup>3</sup> families of 10-20 individuals were scattered along the shores of Potomac Creek. Each family had a precisely demarcated territory relegated for their exclusive use, and watermen never crossed into the waters belonging to other families. Each family raised a garden of their own. The watermen made nets and traps by hand; haul seines, fyke nets, pounds nets, drift nets, eel traps, and crap pots were all utilized. The community was so isolated, Leroy recalled, that the watermen remained completely unaware of the Great Depression until an outsider inquired as to how they were faring, and seeing their uncomprehending stares, informed them of the economic strife plaguing the rest of the nation. They fished to feed their families and to sell to the other local families, and "not for big money." Men made their own boats by hand, purchasing lumber from local sawmills. The most common watercraft in the "old times" was a simple skiff, maneuvered with the use of oars, on occasion complemented by a linen sail.

In the 1940's, life for the watermen took a decisive turn with the introduction of the electric motor. Without a motor, a watermen's range was greatly limited, but when skiffs were outfitted with four to six horsepower motors, fishermen from other

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<sup>3</sup> Newtons, Jetts, Sullivans, Bournes, and Owens

communities began to travel up Potomac Creek to set their nets and traps, cutting freely across the aforementioned territorial boundaries. Suddenly there was vastly increased pressure on the fish, crab, and oyster populations, and the White Oak watermen were forced to travel further from home in pursuit of richer waters.

These changes that occurred on the waters of Potomac Creek in the 1940's were deeply disruptive to the community as a whole. Of course, though, the time preceding the 1940's was in no means static, or devoid of transformation. But to today's White Oakers, this time of tumult is seen as the lynchpin of change, with the time just preceding it near Edenic. To many White Oakers, with the passing of the community's elders, those who were children "before the deluge," the community's ties to its unique past stand the risk of being irretrievably lost. To Gary, this fear is precisely what fuels Tribal reformation today. In his words, he, his friends, and his kin are breaking their silence and opening up to the inquiry of outsiders because "[his] generation and the ones to come are in serious trouble."

In the words of Simon Weil, "A collectivity has its roots in the past. We possess no other life, no other sap, than the treasures stored up from the past and digested, assimilated, and created afresh by us." This is precisely the feeling among those individuals, like Gary, who see themselves as the generation that never had the opportunity to know firsthand that which what is now seen as something essential to White Oak. They feel, in effect, that they've missed the boat. They look to their fathers, therefore, to help bridge this cultural breakpoint, where any silence, any omission, could very well prove eternal.

Nietzsche, for all of his doom and gloom, sees great opportunity in the hands of these last carriers of culture, those individuals who possess all that remains of a sacred and

revered past. On one hand, they could resignedly identify themselves as “the late and bitter fruit of a powerful stock, giving that stock a further spell of cold life.” For this class of latecomers, Nietzsche darkly writes, “Annihilation follows their halting walk on tiptoe through life. They shudder before it in the midst of their rejoicing over the past. They are living memories, and their own memories have no meaning, for there are none to inherit them.” Perhaps there are old men in White Oak, those who cast their first nets in the 1930’s before the arrival of gasoline-powered motors and traps made of galvanized steel, that feel this way. There are others, however, who have responded to this responsibility in another way; rather than ‘shuddering before annihilation,’ these men, seen by the community as epigoni, as latecomers, can instead declare, in Nietzsche’s formulation, that “The race is at its zenith, for it has manifested itself consciously for the first time” (Nietzsche 51-52). This, I believe, is that path that many of the oldest watermen in White Oak would like to pursue.

These men recognize a crisis in the hearts and minds of their community, but when I speak with them, they do not convey any sense of impending annihilation. The White Oak that they recall from their youths, recalled with the utmost warmth and nostalgia, offer lessons and solace that can strengthen the community in this time of crisis, when interpersonal ties are weakening, young people are quick to leave the community, and traditional lifeways are being threatened by the pressures of encroaching modernity. The point of disputation, however, is the banner under which their friends and family intend to place these cherished memories. Today, the old men’s knowledge of the “old times” will not be used to strengthen “White Oak”, a community they know and have been raised to love, but rather to bolster and buttress a newly formalized, and in a sense, unfamiliar community: The Patawomeck Tribe. As tribal reorganization moves forward,

a new, community-wide identity is taking shape. “The Indian thing,” that is, their shared descent from an indigenous group, though certainly known by all of the community members, did not serve as the community’s overarching vision of group identity until only very recently.

### **“The Indian Thing”**

*“If a man sets out on an expedition, determined to prove certain hypotheses, if he is incapable of changing his views constantly and casting them off ungrudgingly under the pressure of evidence, needless to say his work will be worthless” (From the anthology:175).*

-Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*

On the surface, there is one, central debate among the Patawomeck: The tribe is formulating a strategy to petition the State of Virginia for formal recognition, and the State can be difficult to convince. This debate, with Patawomeck tribal members on one side and the Virginia Council on Indians and The Commonwealth of Virginia on the other, is both public and highly visible. It has been discussed in the work of previous William & Mary students, and frankly, is easily accessed. There is another debate underway in White Oak, however, that lies just below the surface. Research carried out by previous students indicates that there were, and are, members of the broader White Oak community who, while related by blood to enrolled tribal members and thus eligible for membership, have refused to step forward and enroll themselves. This issue has not been directly or adequately investigated; it is, however, a very real and anthropologically noteworthy one. However, to make this point of community discord my explicit object of inquiry would likely have put me at odds with everyone in White Oak, and as a result I could only approach the matter obliquely.

This was not the matter that I set out to investigate. I intended only to learn more about the watermen, a group that I knew was almost entirely unrepresented on the tribal rolls, and who had been the object of little research, Doug Owens' 2002 work notwithstanding. Within a matter of days, however, I was cognizant of the disputation. Some men I could expect to steer the conversation toward the "Indian thing." For these individuals, their Indian heritage was openly acknowledged: "75 or 100 years before John Smith arrived, *we* were nomads," or similarly, "Jamestown couldn't have survived without *our* help, so who's more righteous? The one's sharing the grub." For others, though, including all of the eldest men I spoke with, the "Indian thing" was rarely mentioned, and when my questioning vis-à-vis the community's indigenous past became more direct, their equivocality became all the more marked and measured. There is a definite awareness that the community of their youth did have a tenebrous but very real connection to local Indians, but because children were always told simply "to get off it" when their questioning took that tack, it never acquired much power in the elders' understanding of self or community. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Leroy that was printed in the Patawomeck newsletter:

*As a young boy, Leroy remembers two Indian men who used to come visit them once a year or so. His grandmother had a quilt on the bed that one of them wanted to buy. He came down the steps with the quilt over his arm but since the quilt was a family heirloom that had been made by her mother she really didn't want to sell it. Apparently, the visitor was so persistent that he eventually won out and the quilt was sold to them for \$5. After they visited with them, the pair would then go to see some others around the neighborhood. Old Man Luther Newton and Willy Newton were two that Leroy remembered in particular.*

What a stark contrast this short story reveals, between how Leroy and his son situate themselves relative to the "Indian thing." To Leroy, "Indian men" arrive from an unknown place to discuss unknown matters. The other old men, Jimbo, Rich, and

Gordon, never acknowledged the “Indian thing” to any greater degree. Gary, meanwhile, proudly equates “Indian” with “us.” Here, a perplexing intergenerational dynamic is manifested plainly: the second-oldest generation is deeply devoted to their elders and defers humbly to their knowledge, but simultaneously, with some notable exceptions, this generation breaks sharply with the senior figures apropos of their Indian identity.

These ‘notable exceptions’ were those members of the penultimate generation who, breaking the mold of their age-mates, followed the lead of the elders in rejecting or ignoring the “Indian thing.” Earl, an active, fulltime waterman, is an example of such an anomaly. As he said one morning while checking and re-baiting crab pots on the creek, “the Indian thing just doesn’t resonate with me.” He’s seen ‘*Chief*’ Green’s long hair, he tells me with a wry smile, and knows his ‘Indian name.’ The tribe asks Earl to attend the tribal meetings. Why should he go, he asks me? After all, he’s got everything he needs right there on the water. One need only attend a tribal meeting, however, to see that men of his generation, those born in the forties and fifties (or “after the deluge”), are leading the push for tribal reorganization. Both the tribal Chief and Assistant Chief fall into this category, as does the tribal historian and the unofficial archivist. What’s missing, one cannot help but notice, is old men. But only with a little digging does one notice another fact: the active watermen, even those whose generational age-mates represent the Tribal vanguard, show an equally pronounced hesitance regarding Tribal matters and their own Indian identity. The question, of course, is why.

**Some perspective on the history of the water and the watermen as related to local history:**

As the 87 year-old Leroy told me many times, White Oak was built on three things: “farming, fishing, and forestry.” As J.B., the tribal archivist, confirmed, until after World War II, there were no fulltime watermen; everyone fished, farmed, hunted, and trapped. Between the 1950’s and today, there have been men in White Oak wholly dependent on the water for their livelihood, and others who chose not to work the water at all. “Before the deluge,” however, all men in White Oak worked the water, gathering fish, crab, and oysters, while complementing these riparian activities with the cutting of timber and the cultivating of individual family garden plots. In short, farming, fishing, and forestry combined to keep the wheels of White Oak turning. Now though, no one depends upon either farming or forestry; fishing is the only surviving piece of the triad, the only aspect of the “old times” fully linked to livelihood.

## ***Chapter Two***

### ***The Watermen & The Tribe***



Contemporary Patawomeck Feather Box  
Printed in the Patawomeck Tribal newsletter:

*This box is stored in the Patawomeck Pipe Box along with the Ceremonial Pipe. This is a "Feather box" that holds the feathers that attach to the Ceremonial Pipe stem when it's brought out for a ceremony. The two eel pots and the blue crab grasping the tail of two eels are all carved to 'symbolically' honor our Patawomeck Watermen who continue to make their living from the river and have continued to carry on that tradition over many, many generations. Throughout the centuries in fact they have continued to crab and fish these waters - from the time that our Patawomeck ancestors wore moccasins... and tattooed their bodies to "symbolize" their Tribal identity.*

-Robert "Two Eagles" Green, March 2009 *Patawomeck Tides*

When doing fieldwork among the Chambri in Papua New Guinea, Frederick Errington and Deborah Gewerts found that New Guinea as a whole “provided a modernist context in which the rhetoric of culture was extraordinarily preoccupying” (Errington 1996:114). Such is the case in White Oak, where rampant and rapid modernization has occurred in the last sixty years, and questions of culture history weigh heavily on many hearts and minds. Errington goes on to write:



*On the individual level culture was, in many regards, increasingly enacted as personal lifestyle choice, and on the collective culture was, comparably, increasingly enacted as interest-group politics, as serving loosely to link persons pursuing provisionally shared self-interests. (Errington 1996:114).*

And:

*As Chambri were, both individually and collectively, trying to ascertain what traditions to preserve, transform, or abandon, the meanings of both modernity and tradition/culture as major and explicit reference points were themselves being negotiated and mutually affected... (Ibid.)*

Of course, the manner in which a group in Papua New Guinea adapts to the pressures of modernity cannot be directly compared to what is taking place today in White Oak, but many of the same themes apply. There is certainly an aspect of interest-group politics at work, and a willingness or refusal to enroll in the Tribe can accurately be labeled as a “personal lifestyle choice.” Tradition and culture “as reference points” are certainly being negotiated; for some individuals, Patawomeck history is a matter of little or no concern, while to others, it represents the very foundation upon which the community was built, and the reference point for all of the community’s peculiar history.

In the following section, I will present direct testimony from my informants as they responded to my questions regarding the water and the watermen. In section that follows it, I will include those comments by my informants that concerned the “Indian thing,” or “Indian-ness” more broadly. In an attempt to organize, I will begin with those individuals currently enrolled in the Tribe, and end with those who are not.

### **Enrolled in the Tribe:**

Because of Gary’s centrality to my field experience, it seems fitting to begin with him. As a reminder, Gary worked briefly as a waterman in his youth, and again shortly in

the 1980's, but ultimately found other modes of employment to be preferable or more financially viable. From Gary's perspective, over the last 60 years, the watermen have felt "a pressure to develop;" As much as you want to hold on to tradition, he would say, if you try to, "you'll just be swallowed up." As more productive technology became available to the watermen, "it just didn't make sense to continue to make, for example, white oak and pine eel traps if you were trying to feed your family. You get pulled in so many different directions financially and you're competing with better-equipped people." Gary's solution was to give up the watermen's lifestyle, which he did first at age 17 then again in the early 1980's after a brief return to the water.

He remains active in a different capacity, though, campaigning for increased awareness of declining water quality in Potomac Creek and providing the use of his private dock to the active watermen. While Gary recognizes the great difficulty in depending wholly on the water for one's livelihood, and admits that watermen had no choice but to adopt many of the tools and techniques of their competitors if they hoped to turn a profit, he often reassured me that traditional practices are still very much alive in White Oak, though disappearing rapidly. He told me on one occasion, for example, that "J.B.'s dad knew how to make seine, if he wanted to, but it was faster to buy your own. We still know, but it would take days and days to make it." Similarly, "you won't find a handmade wooden boat around here anymore, but they still have the know-how to build one." In effect, Gary made sure to remind me that the "old ways" haven't disappeared completely, and thus, there yet remains something to be resuscitated.

Gary focuses too on the deterioration of the water and the disappearance of the abundance of life that it once supported: "Families used to be able to fish all through November and still catch. They'd average 100 bushels a day, and all hardshells. You

can't get even close to those numbers today." To make any money today, he tells me, "you'd have to have 5000 pots and crab 24 hours a day." The fact of the matter is, of course, that people still do make money on the water, and not because they work 5000 pots around the clock. Because Gary hasn't fished in decades, his knowledge of contemporary techniques doesn't compare to that of the active watermen, and though he knows that the water is polluted and catches are declining, he isn't faced with the task of making ends meet under these less than favorable conditions. At times, I felt that Gary sought to justify his break with tradition, his abandonment of the watermen's lifestyle, and his search for employment outside of the community: "You spend 150 dollars a day on gas and 40-50 dollars per bushel of bait for the crab pots, so you can't make a profit." In his eyes, pollution has spoiled the water and destroyed the viability of the watermen's lifestyle. Though, as Gary would then often fondly recount, drawing presumably from the recollections of his father, it's all only a recent development. The waters of Potomac Creek, as recently as his father's youth, were rich, and a watermen's daily catch was bountiful. If the encroachment of outsiders and foreign, modern elements can be presented as superlatively destructive, his break with tradition has found its scapegoat; perhaps, if he can pin blame on to forces outside of his control, then he can be absolved of transgression and can recast himself, through his role as a Tribal leader, as a cultural protector.

J.B. Newton, a relative of Gary's, is the director of the White Oak Museum, a small brick structure which formerly served as the community's only schoolhouse, that today houses an impressive collection Civil War artifacts and exhibits. It features too a small display of American Indian artifacts with varied provenance and a single room dedicated to the history of the local watermen. He is an enrolled tribal member, and

provides the museum as the meeting place for the monthly Tribal meetings. In his mid fifties, J.B. is on the lower cusp of Gary and Earl's generation. Though he fished and crabbed throughout his youth, he prefers combing the area's swamps and forests with his father in search of Civil War relics, and spent the great majority of his life doing so. He ceased to work the water in the early 1980's.

His penchant for meticulous organization and precise record-keeping has earned him the right to organize all documentation pertinent to Tribal efforts, and he provided me with a compendium of receipts, maps, and photographs tracing back White Oak's link to Potomac Creek well before the Civil War. Unlike Gary, J.B. is soft-spoken and reticent, and although my questioning hovered over the watermen, his true passion is the Civil War, and every conversation invariably returned to it. Thus, while he gladly retrieved information pertaining to local fishing history and presented it to me, such matters were rarely the topic of discussion.

Where Gary revealed his perspective on the watermen and Potomac Creek in words, J.B. did so through the documentation he provided, and the exhibit he assembled and displays at the museum. The documentation, the earliest of which is a map of Potomac Creek dated 1834 with two patches of unmarked dots that J.B. claims (and with good reason) may represent the poles that watermen once drove into the mud to keep their nets in place, outlines the long historical relationship between White Oak and the water. In the Commonwealth of Virginia's "Tribal Recognition Criteria," it is stated that a petitioning Tribe must be able to "Trace the group's continued existence within Virginia from the first contact to the present." Chief Green, in the quotation that serves as this chapter's epigraph, refers to "our Patawomeck watermen," who "have continued to crab and fish these waters - from the time that our Patawomeck ancestors wore

moccasins.” J.B.’s exhibit illustrates the deep history of fishing and crabbing in the community, but the disengagement of today’s active watermen with the Tribe undermines the claim, no matter how true-to-life it may be.

The museum exhibit itself features myriad tools of the watermen’s trade, and includes also mounds of oyster shells pulled from indigenous shell middens and stone fishing weights made and used by the same. Among the collection, one also finds photographs of contemporary watermen and examples of the same wire traps that are used today. In the collection, too, is an eel-pot made by J.B. himself. The traps are no longer in use by today’s watermen, and I see his construction and display of such a trap as exemplary of a process, described here by Frederick Errington, “in which the meaning and use of culture [is] shifting as it [is] invoked in modernity” (Errington 1996:114). The last of these handmade, white oak eel pots was used for its original purpose in the 1980’s, and now exists only as a museum piece and an artifact of White Oak culture history. But while the Tribe places immense value on the traps, one of the elderly watermen I spoke with, not enrolled in the tribe, casually led me to a shed on his property pulled one out from under a pile of garbage and debris.

### **Not Enrolled in the Tribe:**

Each of my interviews with Earl took place on his boat, ankle-deep in fish, as nets were hauled up and their contents dumped on board. He goes out on the water every day, and has been doing so all of his life. He began fishing, crabbing, and oystering in the 1940’s, he told me, as a very young child. He has seen firsthand the dramatic decline in fish and crab populations in the Creek. More importantly, though, I found that he

formulates local history in a style notably different from Gary's. While Gary is concerned with "tradition," and on the preservation of what's "old," Earl has an eye on adaptation, and sees himself fitting seamlessly into the history of White Oakers' longstanding and ongoing relationship with Potomac Creek. Where Gary sees the 'end,' Earl sees a hurdle, and his continued (successful) relationship with the water should be seen as evidence that he's overcome it.

For Earl, the point of emphasis is continuity and successful adaptation. As he told me, for example, fish used to be taken by wagon, and later, by car, into Fredericksburg, where they were sold whole; "the fish wasn't cleaned, and no one asked for it cleaned. The last fish I sold whole was in the seventies. But then, younger people didn't want to buy fish that hadn't been cleaned, so the market disappeared." In Gary's account of this same event, fish used to be sold whole, "but now they'd rather go to McDonald's and get it on a sandwich." From Earl's perspective, the market changed, and the watermen changed with it. Today, he sells fish live to stock ponds, where people pay to fish the stocked water for recreation. This, needless to say, isn't a "tradition," but a recent development that cropped up as watermen searched for ways to turn a profit. As Earl sees it, the history of the watermen is full of change, and he doesn't see the adaptations that his generation has come up with as a severance from that history.

Rich and Chuck, two men of the oldest generation who worked as watermen throughout their lives and remember pre-1940's White Oak distinctly, describe the history of working the water in White Oak in much the same way as Earl does. They see change as a matter of practicality, not as the slow death of White Oak's unique history. As Rich told me, the switchover from split pots to wire pots took place in the 1940's, and was a matter of necessity; the split pots, made from white oak saplings, would last only two to

three seasons and then would have to be replaced. Moreover, one might have to spend three days just to find the right saplings for the job, while sheets of wire mesh could be purchased cheaply and would last many years before requiring replacement. In a similar vein, when the option became available, car engines were rigged up to wooden skiffs, eliminating the need for sails and oars. In the 1950's, men who had become proficient at building the wire eel pots could make a living selling them to those men "who didn't know how, or didn't have the time." Today, both of the men sell steamed crab as their primary source of income. Rich buys locally, while Chuck works with a commercial supplier. The "old times" are remembered fondly by these men, but not as a bygone era, frozen in the annals of history. The watermen's identity did not evaporate when wire replaced strips of white oak, when haul seines were outlawed by Virginia Fish & Game, or when handcrafted wooden skiffs were ousted by commercially produced aluminum hulls. To Earl and the eldest men, local history is defined by change, and the most recent ones are not fundamentally different than those that came before. For them, to remember old techniques and tools, to know how to build a white oak eel pot or a fyke net, is a point of pride, but the fact that today's watermen use machine-made seine and wire pots is not to be lamented. It isn't a failure or the end what it means to be a waterman in White Oak. It's simply another step, and a sign of one's ability to learn quickly and adapt wisely to a rapidly changing world.

As the image and quotation at the start of this chapter should clearly indicate, the watermen and the community's relationship to the water are both integral parts to contemporary Tribal identity. The image of the white oak eel pots adorn tribal t-shirts and caps, and today's watermen are widely acknowledged as inheritors of a sacred tradition. However, not once in the field did I hear a present or former waterman refer to

himself as a “Patawomeck watermen” as Chief Green does above. The men who utilized this terminology were those who had long since set aside their nets and traps in lieu of other forms of employment, or in some cases, had never been watermen in any capacity. Those who worked the water “before the deluge,” and the few who still depend on it today, referred to themselves only as “watermen,” and nothing more. As an epigraph to my first chapter, I quoted David Lowenthal’s *The Past is a Foreign Country*: “To know what we were confirms that we are.” This encapsulates the core of the Patawomeck tribal reorganization, and a crucial facet of the Tribe’s attempts at understanding “what we were,” knowledge of which is validation “that we are,” lies in the history of the community’s relationship to Potomac Creek. The active watermen, and the oldest men whose generation invariably worked the water, however, seem not to exhibit the same hungry pursuit to flesh out the question of “what we were,” and if these men do not sense such a void, they are not left grasping for the explanation of “what we are.”

Today’s active watermen engage in a tradition with a distinctly remembered past; ‘waterman’ is what they were, and they know it well. They see themselves as inheritors of the “old ways,” the intimate details of which are known only to the eldest individuals. These eldest men know ‘what they were,’ and it seems to me that the active watermen today have the same sense, of an identity firmly and comfortably rooted in the past. It is the others, those who make up the majority of the Tribal rolls, that are struggling to define precisely ‘what they were.’ They do not engage in the same practices as the “old timers” did, and in many cases, have relocated out of the community as the encroachment of the modern world, and its Siren-like calls promising wealth and happiness abroad, tempted or forced them away.

To belong to a particular past, though, is of incalculable importance; as



Lowenthal writes, “The past is integral to our sense of identity; ‘the sureness of ‘I was’ is a necessary component of the sureness of ‘I am.’ Ability to recall and identify with our own past gives existence meaning, purpose, and value” (Lowenthal: 41). For today’s watermen, it seems enough just to be a waterman. The community *is* descended from the historical Patawomeck; this is not a point that anyone would be right to contend. That particular history, as I’ve begun to show, though, is not of equal significance to everyone in White Oak.

### **Patawomeck Past vs. Watermen Past**

Former William & Mary student Jason Zacchetti wrote the following on the contemporary community in White Oak and their Indian identity in the formal of his thesis: “They have defined themselves in the past not as Indians, but as watermen. The group imposed silent rules governing the expression of their Indian identity, restricting it as a ‘family secret...Today they are the same ethnic group with a new emphasis” (Zacchetti 2002:3). In my field experience, I found that this emphasis on Indian identity varied in its strength from individual to individual, though it was mentioned both my active and former watermen, as well as those enrolled in the Tribe and those that aren’t. The following are direct quotations from three of my primary informants:

*All that’s left of the Indians in Virginia and in the region is in the small amount of blood among these people. They say, ‘You don’t have much blood that’s Indian,’ but it’s everything that’s left. How can you compare the Indians here to the Indians out West according to the same criteria?”—Personal Communication with J.B. Newton*

*When you’re taught this stuff about your Indian past, you don’t think you’ll ever have to prove you’re Indian so you don’t ask more, you just accept what you’re told. — Personal Communication with Gary Newton*

*My grandfather's generation wouldn't talk about the Indian thing, and if people asked they'd tell you 'you shut your mouth and get off it!' – Personal Communication with Earl Larcher*

Here, we see two former watermen, who ceased to work the water in the 1980's, and one currently active waterman, as they refer directly to the community's Indian heritage.

Leroy, a member of the eldest generation, acknowledges this Indian heritage as well, though with less frequency. What this indicates is that Indian identity is not flatly denied by any member of the White Oak community, regardless of age or occupation, but while some individuals find comfort and strength in this fact, others regard it with greater indifference.

Gary, for example, described to me in detail all local sites where Indian remains and artifacts had been uncovered or were thought to exist. He escorted me to a medicine wheel that the Tribe had constructed on a local hilltop. J.B. printed out photocopies of those select members of the community, now deceased, with the most pronounced American Indian physiognomy and gave them to be for my perusal. He lent me books that described the historic fishing practices of the Powhatan Chiefdom. They sought actively to encourage my understanding and appreciation of this link.

Earl, Rich, and Chuck, however, gave prominence to another historical continuity, that between the “old times,” namely the pre-WWII era, and today's watermen. Each of my interviews with Earl was done aboard his boat, gathering resetting nets throughout the course of every discussion. Chuck led me around his “crab shack” as he made transactions with his wholesale seafood providers and dumped bushels of live crabs into boiling vats of water and seasoning, all the while keeping an eye on incoming and outgoing customers as they made their purchases. Rich posed with me for

photographs alongside his many crab pots, which both he and his son make ample use of every season. There was a different historical and cultural emphasis being acted out between these two groups; while both groups are party to the same community and all are, in one way or another, kin, the collective tradition with which these two groups identify is pronouncedly and emphatically different.

The watermen of today learned their trade from the generation that preceded them. As such, they consider themselves to be direct inheritors of tradition. This is the thread that connects the old men of today, who by and large refuse to participate in tribal reformation efforts, and contemporary watermen who, again, by and large, do the same. While other sectors of the White Oak community have, in many ways, transitioned from the “old times” to the “new” (Tribal Chief Robert “Two Eagles” Green works as a corporate trainer for an insurance company), the watermen keep that which Leroy, Jimbo, Rich, and Gordon recall from their youths alive in a form more corporeal than memory and thought. Much of White Oak looks back with nostalgia on the “old times,” but that which these old men recall so warmly, rivers teeming with herring and rockfish, pots overflowing with hefty blue crabs, and a serenity and autonomy only possible in isolation, is all much more than just a memory for the watermen. They fish the same waters that their fathers once did, and when the average White Oaker laments the cheap subdivisions that have sprouted up across Stafford Country, or the state of the dying Creek, soaked in pollutants from far off industrial plants, their sadness is linked with place and memory, but detached from livelihood. Such is not the case for the active watermen, who set their nets and pots every day, and depend on what the river provides to support themselves and their families.

This partly explains why, to both the old men and the watermen, Patawomeck history is not a point of great interest, as it is with other members of the community. The history of the Creek and of the land that surrounds it, of how men and women made a living upon it, for these individuals, is a story that's still unfolding. By encouraging the eldest generation and the active watermen to become involved in Tribal efforts, asking that they reach far back in time and in search of an identity, the watermen may feel that their history and identity, and that of the eldest men, is being denied or prematurely shelved in museum displays and ethnohistories. Though and farming and forestry, two pillars of the "old times." may be gone, fishing, the history of the Creek and of how men utilized it, is very much alive. This, I believe, is what connects the old men and the watermen, and explains in part why one won't find either on the tribal rolls.

Where anthropologists have discussed these sorts of issues, of culture's meaning and use as it articulates with modernity, "tradition" is normally invoked as a mode of resistance; when a community feels that tradition is suffering under the weight of modernity, we often see a focused effort to protect it. In White Oak, however, there is a dispute regarding whether tradition is truly in need of protection, and more fundamentally, what the community's tradition really is.

Both traditions, both aspects (or versions) of local community history, should be sources of pride for everyone in White Oak. As I wrote in a letter to be printed in the Tribal newsletter a few months ago, "The history of the Patawomeck is rich, and I am glad you all gave me the wonderful opportunity to take part, in however small a way, in its continued reconstruction and revitalization." I wish I had an opportunity to convey the same notion to today's few remaining active watermen, and to those old men who express the same hesitancy and unwillingness. Though within White Oak there may be

disputes now over how local history ought to be configured, I hope and expect that reconciliation waits on the horizon. White Oak draws its strength from interdependence, and while multiple histories may be jockeying for position now, one might consider even the current disputes to be part and parcel of their one, shared history.

## ***Chapter Four***

### ***Reflexivity***

#### **“The Uncomfortable Discipline”**

Malinowski felt that anthropologists “have the right and duty to formulate their conclusions in a way in which they can be seriously considered by those who frame policy and carry it out” (Malinowski 1961:195), though there exists a concomitant aim to distance ourselves from anthropology’s colonial, imperialistic heritage and assist in giving voice to those communities of which it has been denied. Moreover, as Raymond Firth argued, “we need to focus our work more on social problems, and on communication with those already engaged on such problems” (Firth: 1981). What was I to do, though, when a matter of great interest to me (and, I believe, to modern anthropology broadly) came to my attention, namely the rupture between the Patawomeck Tribe on one side and local elders and active watermen on the other, the explicit investigation of which had the potential to set the two parties at odds with each other and inflame a dispute that served as a barrier to successful Tribal reorganization and broader community unity?

How could I inquire into and discuss the reasons that the oldest men and active watermen have for not enrolling in the Tribe and not undermine the efforts of the Tribe itself, which seeks only to bring a fragmenting community back together under one banner, to revitalize an aspect of their shared cultural heritage? The conflict is made all the more pointed, I should add, when the Tribe's efforts stand the chance of simultaneously strengthening each community's member's sense of personal belonging and lending the community as a whole the power to oppose the rapid encroachment of mainstream American society. Could I have explicitly discussed with any of my informants the divide that I saw, especially considering the fact that I was only invited to White Oak by the Tribe to assist in their attempts at bridging this gap and aiding in the healing of difference?

Students of anthropology today, and I speak as one of them, often wonder at what exactly the "point" of the discipline is. In class, we're taught that ethnography arose in opposition to the rising trend of scientific racism, and to bring the diversity of the world's peoples into focus. As the era of colonialism came to an end and formerly colonized people asserted their rightful independence, the discipline recoiled, fearful of serving as a handmaiden to Western hegemony and usurping the voice of the colonized or oppressed. The traditional ethnographic monograph made too much of a claim to truth, and increased interlocution and multivocality were pursued. All the while, factions of anthropologists attempted to apply the brake, denouncing the discipline's seeming shift away from the 'scientific.' As if this dynamic were not confusing enough for the modern student of anthropology, add then the fact one's community of study is in disagreement over what, exactly, their 'culture' is, and an initiate such as myself is rendered baffled and open-mouthed.

This is not to say, though, that the experience was in any way rendered pointless or unedifying. Quite the contrary, in fact: Over the course of a single year, I went from bright-eyed but naïve student who preemptively fancied himself a social scientist, to a wiser, more thoughtful individual who possesses a better understanding of the conflicts and complications intrinsic to anthropology in the modern world. Fieldwork is often considered to be a rite of passage in the discipline of anthropology, and because I consider the experience to have been so personally enlightening, I find it fitting to proceed now to a more reflexive mode of discussion. It seems more than appropriate, in fact, to include in one's first ethnographic text an account of first impressions and second-guesses, a reflection on the mindset of today's ethnographer as he, for the first time, sets foot into the field.

In his introduction to *Writing Culture*, a collection of essays which deal primarily with the process of "writing up" the field experience, James Clifford wrote the following of the writing process: "We have to approach it as an analytical task, in which the form of our reports and representations is as powerful and significant as their content" (109). The process of producing an ethnographic text, to Clifford, is as important, and thus merits as much time and effort on the part of the ethnographer, as the process of ethnographic data itself. This assertion is at the root of a heated debate in the broader discipline of anthropology, in which some texts are labeled as too literary, too poetic, too reflexive, or too speculative, and ethnographic "purists" lament the disappearance of the traditional ethnographic monograph a-la-Malinowski. To these traditionalists, to write of the ethnographer as an active agent in the field subverts the integrity of the ethnographic field experience itself, which rests on the belief in an unbiased observer who records culture as it unfolds before his eyes. In a scathing critique of overzealous reflexivity and

discursiveness in ethnographic writing, Paul Roth warns us that this new ethnography, “thus reconceived,” “makes self-conscious authorial positioning an authenticating device, a mode of legitimating claims to ethnographic authority.” He adds, moreover, that reflexivity serves a tacit purpose as of yet unacknowledged by those writers who utilize the style; to readers, “self-conscious self-representation signals a reliable narrator and confers a credibility on the text” (Roth:557). Perhaps this chapter could be labeled as too much of an art, as “literature based on anthropological themes – and no longer anthropology” (Roth:561), but having grappled with formulating a more traditional ethnography, I find this self-conscious chapter to be an illuminating and truth-protecting necessity.

Returning to Clifford, a stalwart advocate of reflexivity’s merits, I feel, as he does, that throughout the discipline, “the actual field experience of the ethnographer is presented only in very stylized ways (the arrival stories discussed below by Mary Pratt, for example.) States of serious confusion, violent feelings or acts, censorships, important failures, changes of course, and excessive pleasures are excluded from the published account” (*WC*, 13). Over the decades since the publishing of Malinowski’s field diaries from the Trobriand Islands, many authors of widely read formal ethnographies have wrestled with the task of “writing themselves” back into the field account. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* was whitewashed and scrubbed down; Malinowski the person, who struggled through the much of the gamut of human emotion during his stint in the field, was almost entirely absent from his final, well-polished text. However, as Robert N. Bellah rightly declared in his introduction to the Rabinow’s aforementioned follow-up piece, “We all know that field data (or any other kind of data in the human studies for that matter) are not *Dinge an sich* but are constructs of the process by which we acquire



them” (Rabinow:xi). Armed with this simple belief, this ethnographer could see with perfect clarity what needed to be done: the ethnographer himself, in all of his (usually) uncomfortable, nearly always awkward, notebook-clutching glory had to have a place in the modern ethnography, abdicating the illusion of absence and accepting his rightful position as one of the narrative’s central actors. Paul Rabinow’s *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* and Hortense Powdermaker’s *Stranger and Friend* provide just two early examples of this important sea change. This change in attitude is an event that rendered fieldwork, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, its proper dimension: “a work of construction of a representation of a social reality.”

Ethnographic data is not “collected,” and an ethnographic text is not a merely the presentation or reportage of information, and far from a simulacrum of a particular culture. To paraphrase Amanda Atkinson’s argument in her primer, *Making Sense of Qualitative Data*, what the ethnographer learns is fashioned out of his transactions with others. In effect, he creates versions of a social world, and of the social actors within it. No amount of time in the field will bring the ethnographer face to face with a single true account of a society or community. Victor Crapanzano argued that the promise of the ethnohistorian, like the messenger-god Hermes, is not to lie, but not to tell the whole truth, either. Rather than a deliberate act on the part of the ethnography’s author, I see the partiality or incompleteness that Crapanzano references as a characteristic of ethnographic writing inherent to the task itself. We can only represent a version of a community and its constituent individuals as we, as unique individuals, internalize and interpret it. Moreover, each of our informants, who “elaborates for the anthropologist a representation of his own world,” introduces an additional partiality all his own, external

to the ethnographer's own peculiarities. Following is an exploration of these complexities unique to my own field experience.

The Patawomeck have worked with a number of William & Mary students prior to my own engagement with them. Ashley Berger, Jason Zacchetti, and Doug Owens each worked with the tribe, in 1999, 2001, and 2002, respectively. Owens worked with the watermen, as I've stated above, but much, needless to say, remained to be done. Late in the fall of 2007, I was informed that an undergraduate student and member of the Passamaquoddy Tribe of Maine, Berek Dore, was set to visit the home of Gary Newton, an enrolled Patawomeck and former watermen, to discuss further development of the watermen's particular history. Anthropology has a closet-full of dirty laundry, but one commonly heard critique is that budding anthropologists secretly long to make contact with the untouched, with the pristine. I admit to say that I was seized by such a longing, and the prospect of working in a community so accustomed to the presence of young anthropologists was at first uninspiring. To study a community that has already been worked over by another anthropologist (or many others), generated a feeling that I had committed myself to a project that had already lost its luster. The fact that a community has already been studied by another anthropologist, of course, should in no way preclude further inquiry; as Emmanuel Tehindrazanarivelo said of working in the same village that a colleague worked in some years before, "I have increasingly come to understand that not only are our individual perspectives different, but also that the people from whom we gathered information share with each of us different aspects of their traditional and historical knowledge" (Tehindrazanarivelo:56). Every anthropologist is guaranteed to get different results. So, driven by my own intellectual curiosity, I requested the opportunity to accompany Berek in the field. On a cold, wet morning in November

2007, I had my entrée. I have no intention of dwelling on the over-stylized and dully traditional paragon of reflexivity, the “arrival story,” so suffice to say, though possessed of an ebullient spirit of inquiry, on that first visit, I was just plain shy. I abdicated the anthropological reins to Berek, and focused my attention on the unobtrusive recording of anything I identified as “data.”

In Spring 2008, Dr. Danielle Moretti-Langholtz served as instructor for a senior seminar entitled “The Contemporary American Indian Community,” which Buck Woodard succinctly encapsulated as “an exciting semester of research, fieldwork, and conducting interviews with community members<sup>4</sup>” in a project update provided to the tribe in October of 2008. Though I was unable to enroll in the seminar, I did visit the class on occasion to hear tribal leaders speak to the students regarding both tribal history and the ongoing efforts toward reformation and formal political recognition. While this seminar was underway and various papers were being researched and compiled by other students, I was enrolled in a course entitled “Ethnographic Research.” This course, with Dr. Virginia Kerns instructing, was structured around a simple, short-term ethnographic field project of each student’s own design with the intention of introducing students to the complexities of fieldwork and the difficult process of text construction. At this point, having spoken with tribal leaders, discussed the project with fellow students, read the work of Owens, Berger, and Zacchetti, and visited White Oak myself, I decided to make a phone call to Gary Newton, my only contact in the community, and express my interest in working personally with the watermen.

At the time, I recognized the value of this brief exploratory phase in April 2007 as lying not so much in the collecting of ethnographic data, but rather in the

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<sup>4</sup> <http://patawomeckindians.org/Patawomeck%20Tides%20E-Mail%202008.html>

establishment of an sturdy rapport with a handful of important individuals. I was not aware in 2007 of the division in the community that I've discussed above, and thought only that I'd gotten my foot in the door, and was glad that I'd been received so warmly by the Tribe. Having left a sufficiently positive impression on those White Oakers whom I had the privilege to meet, my potential return during the coming summer was a prospect mutually met with hopeful anticipation.

In May I returned home to the indulgence of Philadelphia's western suburbs. It wasn't long, however, before carefree tranquility commenced its steady conversion to restless guilt, and my plans for White Oak began to take shape in earnest. At this juncture, I faced a number of challenges. First, I was forced to face the fact that true immersion, a hallmark of traditional ethnography, was for me an impossibility: I could not live with, or even particularly near, my informants. The individuals I was already acquainted with were glad to assist in my search for habitation, but actually living *in* their homes was an option they never proffered. This, I believe, is a methodological complication that is only going to become more common as globalization continues to run its course. As communities disperse geographically, there is often no distinct core in which to set up camp. In this case, Gary overheard a conversation at the register of a local hardware store: a young man's mother was trying to rent a room near Fredericksburg. Without hesitation, Gary picked up his cell phone, and reported to me the price of the room and its amenities (hot water, AC, and a K-Mart across the street). With pronounced gratefulness, I accepted the proposition. He had found accommodations for the visiting William & Mary student. It was a point of pride for him, and a gesture of welcoming that I could not refuse.

I was uneasy. Air conditioning? K-Mart? A quick look at a map of Fredericksburg placed me a full 20 minutes Southwest of the shores of Potomac Creek, in a solidly middle class residential neighborhood in the shadow of Fredericksburg's infamous "Central Park," a sprawling, traffic-snarling commercial complex that effectively shattered any hopes I'd harbored of true immersion. Can I really call it fieldwork if I'm living 40 seconds off of I-95? The following, and excerpt from a 2007 issue of *North American Dialogues* provides an accurate portrayal of what I was soon to discover:

"Once we've settled on our research site 'at home,' we start to see that the boundaries and distinctions between studying far from home and close to home aren't what we expected. The problematic of the 'Other,' the processes of 'estrangement,' and encounters with the 'foreign' remain anthropological dilemmas<sup>5</sup>" (Waterson:16).

Indeed. Essentially, Waterson argues that one does not have to travel across the globe to find the cultural "Other." She goes on to correctly declare that "We now live in one-world, not separate worlds, and the new 'local' are those sites that articulate with structures of power and economy, but in different ways, producing new webs of meaning and ideas about how to fit into that one-world while retaining something about one's past, experiences, traditions, activities" (Waterson:16). Shopping centers, fast food, and freeways, the trappings of the modern world, cannot be said to engulf distinction or foster a landscape of homogeneity. As what I've written above ought to indicate, I found no shortage of "anthropological dilemmas" in White Oak.

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<sup>5</sup> "Home," to Waterson, refers broadly to North American anthropologists carrying out fieldwork in North American locations. In the article, she investigates the longstanding "second-class status traditionally suffered by North Americanist research," and fundamentally rejects the assertion as invalid and anachronistic

Passing through the city of Fredericksburg, I headed east along White Oak Road and North on to Belle Plains. The scenery changed rapidly and dramatically; in roughly ten miles, the landscape shifted from mega-mall sprawl, to (overly) maintained “historic” downtown Fredericksburg, to wide-open farmland. The many side roads that branched off of the arterial Belle Plains Road bore names of local families, all of which I recognized from my preparatory readings, and all of which have representatives on the Patawomeck Tribal roll: Sullivan Road, Bullocks Lane, Newton Road, Newton Place. Missing his hidden driveway only once, I bounced down a dusty path and parked between a few healthy-looking rows of cabbage and a weathered structure of corrugated tin siding. Peeking through the tree line one hundred yards ahead of me was Gary’s home, and just beyond it, the waters of Potomac Creek.

From inside that weather-beaten tin edifice ambled the familiar form of Gary Newton. His hound, Duke, followed close at his heels, barking wildly at the sight and smell of the unfamiliar. The moment I stepped out of my car, Gary thrust his strong hand toward me and gave it a firm but comforting shake. On my previous visits, particularly when I was accompanying Berec, Gary had seemed congenial but nonetheless focused on getting down to business. Today, he was all smiles, and I sensed that the promise of my relatively lengthy visit had a profoundly altering affect on his mood and deportment. I had visited half a dozen times before, but only for a few hours. On each of these occasions, Gary played the role of host. As a tribal member and my liaison to the watermen, he saw my happiness as his responsibility. He must have done something right, he concluded, because I was back again, and this time for a full month. He was right to be satisfied with himself. The Patawomeck needed the watermen to tell their story, and in his eyes, I was the one to collect it. Gary ushered me into the tin

structure, his welding shop, and sat me down on a seat pulled from the cab of an old Ford pickup. His father, Leroy, leaned in from his seat beside me and shook my hand. “Have you ever heard of Tom Pole?” I shook my head. “Tom Pole used to live around here. He used to stretch his stories. If someone tries to tell you a story like that today, you just say to them, ‘Get away from me, Tom Pole!’” I nodded, and he smiled knowingly. And just like that, conversation began to roll.

For reasons discussed above, that machine shop was my base of operations every day for the next four weeks. Except for supper at around six o’clock, I could always count on finding someone parked on that old Ford couch. At times, it seemed like Leroy never left. According to Gary, he practically never did. Leroy got company throughout the day, old friends and young family, some sitting down to chat for hours, others just stopping by to see how the old-timer was feeling. But Leroy didn’t need company, all the same. On occasion, when I stopped by that cluttered, tin, community-crossroads unannounced, I would catch the old man staring silently into space, his wide, blue, unblinking eyes conveying a trance-like tranquility. At 87 years-old, Leroy had seen a side of White Oak that none of the men of his son’s generation have ever known (though they often tried to recall it). Because of his willingness to talk and the pleasure I took in listening, some days began at that machine shop and ended there, too. From 9 o’clock in the morning until 6 o’clock in the evening, I sat beside Leroy while a cast of White Oak personalities appeared and departed, threading their own bits of knowledge into the tapestry that Leroy and I were constructing. Some days, though, Gary had other plans.

Gary, as a member of the Tribal council, wanted to arrange as many meetings with as many watermen as he could manage. His proactive attitude can be explained in two ways. First, Owens’ 2002 fieldwork had failed in its intended aim, to increase active

and elder watermen's enthusiasm about Tribal efforts. He saw in my presence a second opportunity to accomplish this goal. Second, he felt an obligation to William & Mary, The American Indian Resource Center, and Dr. Moretti-Langholtz. The engagement of these parties with the Tribe represented an act of validation, which the State is still withholding today, and he felt bound to reciprocate the gesture by facilitating a period of fruitful research.

Over the course of the first week, I accompanied Earl as he checked and reset his crab pots and fyke nets, met J.B. and toured the White Oak Museum, was chauffeured across the county on a guided tour, had dinner with J.B.'s mother, hand-harvested bushels of snap peas while discussing local agriculture, and attended my first Patawomeck Tribal meeting. Each of these was arranged by Gary. I began to develop an awareness of the limited scope, the select channels of data, that I was being exposed to. By the end of this first week, the only active watermen I had met was Earl.

Why was Earl so willing to speak with me, and Owens in 2002, while the other active watermen expressed such pronounced hesitancy our outright unwillingness to do so? I learned one thing about Earl very quickly: he is highly competitive, and relished being the object of community envy. In his eyes, he was the only watermen who possessed much of the tradition's esoteric knowledge. He watches other watermen tie their nets, he would tell me, and sees that they do it wrong. The same men come to him, then, complaining about the river. In his words, "It's not the river that's at fault, it's their nets. I'll fix anyone's nets though, no matter what I think of the men individually." While all of the active watermen see themselves as inheritors of the "old times" traditions, he fancies himself a cut above the rest. Michael Taussig wrote that for ethnographers, "Sensitivity to envy is as necessary as the air we breathe." In the case of Earl, and



understanding why he was the sole active waterman to come forward on his own volition, Taussig's dictum proves prescient. Earl saw in the Tribe's pleas for open communication an opportunity to acquire status, to be elevated above his peers and to become the sole source of data concerning active watermen for the Tribe and their William & Mary anthropologists. He could assume this role, and still abstain from enrolling in the Tribe. Perhaps, too, he resented the power and position of leadership granted to Chief Green and the rest of the Tribal council. His actions, though, seem to have put him at odds with many Tribal members; he warned me himself not to mention his name when I approached certain individuals for information, and certain Tribal members implicitly lamented the fact that he was the only active watermen who had stepped forward to speak with me.

All the while, too, Gary pursued other options. I attempted to do the same, though my association with the Tribe invariably preceded me and mired my efforts. The meeting that Gary arranged with Chuck Bourne was initiated without his prior knowledge, but with Gary and I both having set upon him unawares (I was unaware, too, that he had not been forewarned), he was forced to capitulate and granted me the opportunity for an interview. He did not once mention the Patawomeck or the "Indian thing" more generally, but discussed strictly the recent history of the watermen and how he had come to operate the seafood establishment in which we sat.

I expressed to Gary my wish to speak with more active watermen. At one of the Tribal meetings, a man roughly Gary's age approached me and asked if I would like to accompany his son who works as a waterman on the nearby Rappahanock River. I happily accepted his offer, but after receiving a number of equivocal and noncommittal

answers from this younger waterman, was forced to give up and pursue other avenues. Upon hearing this, Gary seemed frustrated, but not particularly surprised.

I found myself spending more and more time between Gary's welding shop and the White Oak Museum, where the great majority of people I encountered were Tribal members; I was drifting further away from the community divide I sought so desperately to examine. I began to wonder, then, as I became more tightly bound to the Tribe, how I could balance my desire to be of help to the community with my own private hopes of doing interesting, relevant, and autonomous ethnography.

Paul Rabinow wrote of his fieldwork in Morocco his community of study, "I was in no position to threaten them, or to offer direct economic or political assistance. In retrospect, this climate was ideal for anthropological inquiry" (Rabinow:19). Perhaps the climate of my own research was somewhat less than ideal. Indeed, he goes on to write:

*There may be situations in which the anthropologist can directly aid the community, but my guess is that they are rare. I have heard 'aid' advocated most fervently by those who have never done fieldwork... If the ethical status of the anthropologist is ambiguous, then the do-gooder, whatever his cause, would seem to be even more profoundly disqualified.*  
(Rabinow: 78)

I felt that I occupied an awkward, liminal position, somewhere between advocate and anthropologist. I was uncomfortable with making political assistance my primary goal, but also unsure of the ethical nature of my desired research question. Was focusing on community discord fair or moral? While reading one evening at the Fredericksburg City Library, however, I came across a passage in Anthony Cohen's *The Symbolic Construction of Community* that provided me with much needed perspective:

*I am always a little ambivalent about advocacy. I always want to advocate; but I also always think that they (the people I've studied) could speak better for themselves than I could for them...I have to distinguish between the local community's need for my advocacy and my emotional and intellectual need/inclination to sympathize with them. I decided long ago that my advocacy – such as it is – had to lie in my ethnography: in*

*presenting them and the complexity of their lives in a way that they would feel did them justice.* (Cohen:1985)

The goal of an ethnography is to represent a society in such a way that a reader will come away knowing more about that society than he had before. To shy away from the difficult, or to ignore a prominent feature of a contemporary community because it seems somehow unpalatable, is to deny the community the community their due complexity. White Oak is not neatly packaged and ready for a quick and painless conversion to text. If this project was to serve as the learning tool I hoped it would be, I had to face the challenging intricacies of Tribal reformation and the White Oak dispute over history and identity, anything less would be unfair both to the Tribe and to the White Oak community as a whole, those enrolled in the Tribe and those not, both of whom deserve a voice.

## **Appendix A**

### **My primary “informants,” or preferably, collaborators:**

**Gary Newton:** My primary contact in the field and my liaison to the rest of the community. Gary was of the original advocates of the Tribal reorganization effort. He worked as a waterman in his youth, and again briefly in the mid 1980's, but has not done so since then. For much of his life, he was a trucker, and today the bulk of his income comes from a welding shop that he operates beside his home.

**Leroy Newton:** Gary's father, and one who worked the water for many years, beginning in his early childhood in the late 1920's. He has a detailed and accurate knowledge of local fishing practices and techniques. He is not an enrolled tribal member.

**Earl Larcher:** A full time waterman, and a member of Gary's generation. Earl has worked the water all of his life, and learned the trade from his grandfather at a young age. He is not an enrolled tribal member.

**J.B. Newton :** J.B. operates the White Oak Museum, which features an extensive collection of Civil War artifacts that he and his father collected throughout Stafford County. The museum hosts the Tribal meetings. D.P has carefully archived much of the historical documentation concerning White Oak and the Patawomeck. He is not an active waterman. Though he worked the water as a young man, he ceased doing so in the mid 1980's. He learned many of the watermen's techniques from his father. He is an enrolled tribal member.

**Rich Bullock:** Rich is a member of the eldest generation, and worked as a waterman all of his life. He operates a kitchen and small restaurant on his property, where he sells steamed blue crab to local buyers. His age prevents him from working the water regularly today, though until very recently he worked alongside his son catching crab and turtle for sale. He is not an enrolled tribal member.

**Chuck Bourne:** Chuck is a member of the eldest generation, and, like Rich, worked as a waterman all of his life. Chuck also operates a seafood restaurant in White Oak, though on a larger scale than Rich. While Rich sells local crab, Chuck buys from commercial providers. Because he can supply greater quantities of seafood, his clientele is more extensive, selling to familiar locals and “newcomers” alike. He is not an enrolled tribal member.

**Addendum: An addendum added for the oral defense, April 28 2009:**

My thesis, which I titled “The Watermen of White Oak & The Patawomeck Tribe” was the result of a four week fieldwork endeavor in Stafford County, Virginia, in a community called White Oak, which is 15 minutes northwest of Fredericksburg. In White Oak, there is a group of people who represent the biological descendents of the historic Patawomeck Indian Tribe, an indigenous community described in numerous colonial-era documents, including the writing of John Smith.

In 1995, the Patawomeck Tribe officially reorganized and reformed, and since this official reformation up to the present day, the Patawomeck have been seeking recognition from the Commonwealth of Virginia as an Indian tribe. I first became aware of the Tribe in the fall of 2007. I expressed interest to Dr. Moretti–Langhtolz and the American Indian Resource Center to conduct or participate in **a** research project. It was at this point that I first visited White Oak, with then-graduate student Berek Dore, who planned to make a trip to the home of Alvin Newton, a council member of the Patawomeck, to interview the local watermen and video-record the production of a traditional split-oak eel pot, a handmade trap, the knowledge and ability to produce which is believed to exist solely in White Oak.

Following this introductory and exploratory visit, I began to consider the potential to develop a proposal to carry out summer research in White Oak, among the watermen, for an honors project. In Spring of 2008, I was able to meet Chief Robert Green and Assistant Chief Gary Cooke when they visited the College to speak at a senior seminar, further strengthening my desire to carry out fieldwork in the community.

I knew, of course, that student research had been done among the contemporary Patawomeck in recent years, but saw a pronounced dearth of data concerning the watermen, a subset of the wider community that includes those individuals who currently work the waters of Potomac Creek and nearby Potomac tributaries, and those who used to do so. Hearing Chief Green speak, I was left with the impression that the watermen, whom he referred to as “our watermen,” represented a distinct group within the wider White Oak and Patawomeck communities. I intended to make this sub-group the focus of my research, and through Chief Green was provided the aforementioned Alvin Newton’s contact information.

In April of 2008, I called Alvin and expressed my interest to return to White Oak for an extended stay during the summer. I told him that I wanted to work with the watermen, and at this stage framed my research as traditionally ethnographic; my intention was to gather raw data, through interview and participant observation, culminating in a detailed description of the lifeways and history of the White Oak watermen. Alvin expressed great interest in assisting my research effort. He found housing for me, not in White Oak itself, somewhat to my dismay, but 20 minutes southeast on the opposite side of Fredericksburg, subleasing a room in the home of a recent acquaintance of his, who was in no way affiliated with the Patawomeck.

For four weeks, the entirety of June, I commuted to White Oak nearly every morning, and spent my days conducting interviews, attending Tribal meetings, going out on the water while nets and traps were set and gathered, was ferried across Stafford Country, had dinner at the homes of Tribal members, reviewed the documentation the Tribe provided, studied old issues of local newspapers that contained articles concerning the watermen, and in short, performed my fieldwork.

Throughout this process, however, I became aware of some complications. First, the oldest men, those 80 years old or more, spoke of the “Indian Thing,” as they called it, in a very different fashion than the younger men, even 15 years their junior, did. Secondly, the great majority of the men I spoke with had not worked the water, as watermen, in over 20 years. Most of the currently active watermen were not enrolled in the Patawomeck Tribe. However, with the Tribe as my host and liaison, it proved extremely difficult to engage these active watermen, or frankly, get in touch with them at all, or to delve into *why* the eldest men did not situate themselves relative to their Indian heritage in the same way as the younger generation.

As Malinowski wrote in Argonauts of the Western Pacific, though, “If a man sets out on an expedition, determined to prove certain hypotheses, if he is incapable of changing his views constantly and casting them off ungrudgingly under the pressure of evidence, needless to say his work will be worthless.” To write of the watermen and the eldest men without attention to this lived rift or divide, to present only an ethnographic account of the local watermen’s history and lifeways without reference to contemporary disagreement or difference in perspective, would be like burying my head in the sand, representing and textualizing *as actuality* the harmonious field setting that I had originally *expected* to find. This, needless to say, was not an option.

But to engage with this issue, this local disagreement, manifested most clearly in the active watermen’s unwillingness to enroll in the tribe and general hesitancy to speak with me, proved predictably problematic. I had entered the field, I had gained my entrée, under the auspices of the Patawomeck Tribe. There were expectations placed upon me by the Tribe, and by my self, to be of assistance to Tribal efforts. I felt a pressure, or at

least a personal inclination, to write something that would show my gratitude to the Patawomeck and my support of their efforts.

Moreover, if I were to engage with this local dispute between the watermen and the Tribe, what was I to do with the large body of data I had gathered that pertained directly to the watermen and the community's historic dependence on the water. If I were to write a thesis that dealt with this very real incongruity concerning how living people today relate to local community history, would there be a place for that pure empirical data? I had no intention of rendering myself unhelpful to the Patawomeck, nor of writing up an ethnography that didn't include the plethora of data I had gathered from my collaborators in the field that pertained to the water and the watermen.

But, as Michel Trouillot argued in Silencing the Past, "historical authenticity resides not in the fidelity to an alleged past but in an honesty vis-à-vis the present as it represents that past;" (148) that is to say, one can write about the watermen in White Oak, about the history of fishing practices, of seasonality, of tools and techniques, but that discussion alone is not enough. There must be a consideration of the present as well, and the community's *past*, and the banner under which it should be *placed*, is a point of disputation *today*. My representation of the past ought to be equally as just to the enrolled members of the Patawomeck Tribe as it is to the watermen who have chosen *not* to enroll, and the oldest men who speak of the "Indian thing" in a very distinct way.

I grappled with this question for a long time, well after I returned from the field and well into the "writing-up" process. I *have* the data to write a formal ethnography, in the vein of Malinowski, Mead, Turner, and Benedict. But such a thesis would feel to me to be evasive, or indicative of willful ignorance. I discussed this concern, over the course of a three or four weeks, with Dr. Moreti-Langholtz, and she encouraged me to



investigate alternative modes of representation and writing style. We discussed postmodern anthropology, and the merits of reflexivity, how societies remember and how social memory is produced and reproduced. I ventured into the work of George Marcus and James Clifford, of Paul Rabinow, who describes the “double-standard of fieldwork,” that you are not a true anthropologist until you’ve done fieldwork, though once you return from the field, anthropology is not the experience in the field, but the objective data you’ve brought back. I searched out, too, essays that grappled with the future of anthropology, of anthropology as advocacy, and the fieldwork’s status in a globalized setting. We discussed, too, how I might situate myself within my work, and how I might see to it that my first true ethnographic “fieldwork” experience be as instructive and illuminating, personally speaking, as possible. We decided, too, that I consider continuing my work with the Patawomeck over the summer after graduation. This was certainly a happy arrangement, as it gave me both the freedom to examine the matters of greatest ethnographic interest to me, and the opportunity to engage in a degree of reflexivity, to discuss the doubts and concerns I felt during the field experience and afterward. I was not forced to choose between a traditional ethnography that made use of all of my hard data and the countless discussions with informants and friends in White Oak, and a reflexive, exploratory, somewhat atypical ethnography that felt like a more fitting cap to my anthropological training *up to this point*, that is, my *undergraduate* experience.

Anthony Giddens, of King’s College at Cambridge University, wrote the final chapter of a 1995 essay anthology entitled The Future of Anthropology: It’s Relevance to the Contemporary World. In it, Giddens writes the following:

“The practical connotations of anthropology are likely to depend more upon a rekindling of the anthropological imagination than upon a narrowing-down of the

subject to limited social policy issues...Anthropology must be ready to contest unjust systems of domination, along the way seeking to identify what ‘injustice’ actually is, and be prepared to bring potentially controversial issues to light” (277). The need to ‘rekindle the anthropological imagination,’ as Giddens writes, is not exactly tantamount to saying, as Clifford Geertz does, that ethnography, “like quantum mechanics or the Italian opera, is a work of the imagination,” but these two notions certainly share common ground. The difference between them, though, of anthropology as in need of imaginative thinking, and of ethnography as a work *of* the imagination, is subtle but deeply significant.

Anthropology as a discipline is in the midst of a crisis, and the its foundational theory no longer offers the same solace it once did. The discipline’s theoretical heritage is incalculably valuable, and the last thing I want to see is a collective amnesia in the discipline, but at the same time, we can’t retreat to structural functionalism, to evolutionist anthropology, or to a Boasian model of cultural anthropology, simply because globalization has eliminated the ‘self-contained’ upon which these broad theoretical schools must rest. Wallerstein’s Political economy a-la-Eric Wolf offers a useful lens through which to view our changing world, but when pen comes to paper, it has limited interpretive power to aid in our engagement with the particularities of singular communities, that while certainly part and parcel of a globalized landscape, retain distinctiveness and individuality. Experimentation in ethnographic thought and writing, and an engagement with that which may not be considered to be the traditional bread and butter of ethnography, should not be shied away from through fear of its novelty, because somewhere between the rekindling of our anthropological imaginations and the

casting of ethnography itself as a work *of* the imagination, there's fertile ground for inquiry and understanding.

All the while, fieldwork is indispensable, and there are indeed empirical facts to be found. As one writes, though, due consideration must be given to how these facts are presented to the ethnographer, what they mean to different individuals or groups in the field of study, what stands to be gained in the presentation of a particular version of the past, and by whom, as well as the anthropologist's place in the entirety of it. Though while this is undeniably a daunting prospect, anthropology retains its core duty and ability to unmask power, and I feel that my investigation into the contestation of local identity and community history in White Oak and among the Patawomeck represents a pursuit of this objective. Never once, though, do I deny the immense complexity of ethnography in the modern world, or adopt a voice that makes too authoritative a claim to a single, neatly-packed but illusory truth. At the core of it all, our responsibility as anthropologists is to present those with whom we work in a way that does them justice, presenting them in all of their complexity, while countering the ethnocentrism that so deeply permeates other disciplines. This was my commitment as I wrote my thesis, and will continue to be such in the coming months when return again to White Oak and the Patawomeck Tribe.

So I attempted to create something with my thesis that was somewhere between Giddens' call for imaginative thinking, and Geertz's model of ethnography as a work *of* the imagination. It was more imaginative, I hope, than a bare-boned monograph of the watermen's history, and possibly more imaginative than Giddens would prefer, but I would not call it either a work of the imagination, as it is grounded too in a foundation of empirical facts, and it presented data in a relatively standard and comprehensible format.

But because I will be working with the ethnographic data I've gathered so far, and returning to White Oak again, throughout the next few months, I could make significant room in the thesis to discuss personal concerns and points of anxiety. I wrote of my concerns of partiality toward the Patawomeck and their own Tribal efforts, of my trouble diversifying channels of data, namely getting the opportunity to speak directly with more active watermen, of my worries about performing 'salvage anthropology,' and more fundamentally, about breaking an implicit promise to the Patawomeck. Even in reflective ethnography, these sorts of doubts and concerns are regularly omitted, or perhaps more seasoned anthropologists have found ways to reconcile or alleviate them. James Clifford feels, in any case, that throughout the discipline, at least as of the late 1980's but from firsthand experience up to this day as well, "the actual field experience of the ethnographer is presented only in very stylized...States of serious confusion, violent feelings or acts, censorships, important failures, changes of course, and excessive pleasures are excluded from the published account." Clifford feels that such exclusions should be back into our ethnographies. I feel that in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, and particularly for students, this ought to be the case. Because I intend not only to continue to work with this community, but to proceed further in my anthropological education, I felt strongly inclined to give these matters prominence in my thesis. As I imagine has been abundantly clear, I contended with a wide variety of topics in a limited space, and perhaps doing so produced an unrefined text, but I hope I've explained in part, at least, why I made the decisions I did, and produced the text you have before you.

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